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DIAMOND-DICK



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DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S Written Receipt;

Or, THE MYSTERY OF CASA GRANDE.

BY W. B. LAWSON.



DIAMOND DICK JR.



W.B. LAWSON

"I HAVE COME TO RESCUE YOU, COMET KATE," WHISPERED BERTIE.

Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Written Receipt;

OR,

The Mystery of the Casa Grande.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I

A DARK PLOT—THE KANAKA VICTIM—A FIGHT IN THE SADDLE.

"Hist! Is that you, Williams?"

"Of course! I told you I'd be here in this lay-out."

"I understand; but we can't be too careful."

"What makes you uneasy, Birdsall?"

"Simply because there's five thousand dollars out for the three of us and the Government is behind the offer."

"Whew! But the Government doesn't know us in the matter?"

"Not yet. Here's the dodger offering the reward."

Two men were conversing in an obscure corner of the Lucky Pocket, a gambling resort not a thousand miles from Tucson, Arizona.

They were not rough-looking men; on the contrary, as their speech implied, they were men of fair education.

In fact, their natty and rather "loud" clothing, together with their soft, white hands, suggested that they might be gamblers.

One man—the one addressed as "Williams"—wore a beard, and it needed no very experienced eye to discover that it was false.

Birdsall, on the contrary, wore only a trim little mustache.

As Birdsall made the final remark, quoted above, he drew a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to his companion.

Williams read it through and handed it back with a reckless laugh.

"Well," he said, "we've got the stuff. Let the Government whistle."

"But the Government is whistling a pretty lively tune."

"How's that?"

"We're suspected. Did you see Black Bruce?"

"Yes."

"What did he suggest?"

"The prettiest kind of a plot."

"Tell it."

Williams glanced uneasily in the direction of a man—a very colossus in size—who was sprawled over a table some little distance away—not far enough, however, to be out of ear-shot.

"Is it safe?"

"Perfectly."

"Who is that fellow over there?"

"Don't know and don't care. He's dead drunk and has been there for two hours. Go ahead with Black Bruce's plot."

"You have heard of a girl called Comet Kate, of Calabasas?"

"Who hasn't? She spends money like water and is called the Countess of Monte Cristo."

"Exactly. Now when was it she began spending money so lavishly?"

"Don't know."

"The day after the Government was touched for the dinero. Before that Comet Kate was a poor girl—a dance I believe. Now why should not the Government suspect her of doing the job?"

Birdsall rubbed his hands delightedly.

"Is that Black Bruce's scheme?"

"Yes."

"Can he throw suspicion that way?"

"He says he can."

"Good!"

"But there's something else that's bothering Black Bruce."

"What's that?"

"Mexican Monte is working at some big scheme on quiet. Bruce thinks we'd better find out what it is."

"We can attend to that as soon as we get safely out of this other deal."

"Bruce thinks that this is just the time for us to disappear from Tucson and go to Casa Grande."

"That would excite suspicion."

"Not so; you forget, my boy, that we are not suspicious characters."

Birdsall laughed, and Williams started suddenly to his feet.

"What's the matter?" asked Birdsall.

"Do you see that half-clad fellow, with the yellow skin, playing poker over there?"

"Yes."

"How long has he been playing?"

"He began long before you and I started our talk. What about him?"

"He is Comet Kate's servant, or slave."

"What is his nationality?"

"He's a Kanaka, and he's a dangerous man. Black Bruce said our first move must be to get him out of the way."

"How'll we do that?"

"When he leaves the room I'll follow him. You go outside and wait at the door. Between the two of us we can take care of him."

"What do you mean? Kill him?"

"No," answered the other, with a shrug; "we'll put him to sleep with a tap on the head, then we'll tie him, and I'll carry him to Casa Grande on my horse. After that Bruce can deal with him."

"All right."

Thereupon both men got up.

Birdsall walked out of the room, and Williams mixed in the crowd that surrounded the poker table.

Barely had the gamblers left the corner when the giant at the near-by table lifted his head and looked cautiously around; then slowly arose and left the gambling-hall.

"This is a surprise party on me," he muttered, "dashed if it an't! But if I don't do my share toward blockin' their game, my name an't Han'sum Harry."

Stepping stealthily through the door of the place, Handsome Harry stood for a moment under the oil-lamp over the entrance.

At one side, half concealed in the shadow, he saw the form of Birdsall.

Pretending to be drunk, Handsome Harry staggered up to the gambler.

"I shay, podner, gi'me two biwts t'—hic—likker up on!"

"Go 'way!" said Birdsall, gruffly; "I haven't got anything for you."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Handsome Harry leaned upon him and bore him to the earth.

Birdsall struggled desperately, but he was as a child in the Californian's grasp.

Turning him flat on his face, Handsome Harry switched the leather band from his hat and tied his hands: with a tie from about his neck he secured his feet and then deftly gagged him with a handkerchief.

Having quickly and silently performed all this, Handsome Harry lifted his prisoner and bore him off into the darkness.

"I an't goin' to hurt ye," he said to Birdsall, as he deposited him at a safe distance from the entrance to the Lucky Pocket. "I want ter see that dockyment ye've got in yer clo's, an' I can't let ye go arterward fer fear ye'll squeal on me. Sabe?"

While speaking the Serpent of Siskiyou had been going through Birdsall's pockets.

At last he found the Government dodger and carried it to the lamp over the door leading into the gambling-hall.

This is the way the bill read:

The United States Government
Will Pay
\$5,000 Reward

for the capture of the ringleaders concerned in the recent robbery of Indian funds, near Tucson, Arizona. Will also give ten per cent. of all moneys recovered.

"Ah, ha!" muttered Handsome Harry, "I'm the possessor of a mighty big secret! So they're goin' ter make Comet Kate stand the brunt of the affair, hey? Not if ther rip-roarin' ole Sarpint of Siskiyou County still has his rattles—an' I think he has. Now ter wait fer the comin' of our festive friend, the Kanaka!"

Handsome Harry took up the position recently occupied by Birdsall and waited.

Ten—twenty—thirty minutes passed, and the Californian began to grow impatient.

Suddenly a horse dashed past the building.

The animal bore two riders.

One was Williams.

Across the saddle, in front of him, lay the still form of the Kanaka.

Before the Serpent of Siskiyou could draw his guns the horse with its two riders had disappeared.

"Confound it!" growled Handsome Harry; "they must have come out by another door. But that hombre hasn't escaped me yet!"

A few paces away the Californian's horse was hitched.

As he leaped into the saddle the full moon came out from behind a cloud, touching the scene with almost the brilliancy of day.

Far ahead Handsome Harry could just distinguish the fleeing horse careering into the shadows with its double burden.

With whip and spur away dashed the old hero of a hundred fights, his jaws set and his eyes burning with determination.

"At least," he muttered, "my horse is fresh whether Williams' is or not, an' I'm not as heavy as the double load that critter yonder has on his back—so the odds are with me!"

Handsome Harry gained upon the gambler leap by leap.

Out across the broad mesa they fled, plunging through arroyos and skimming like arrows along the level.

The Serpent of Siskiyou was finally borne within ear-shot.

"I'm arter ye, Williams," he shouted, "an' I'm dead set on havin' trouble."

"I'll not disappoint you," was the reply that was fluttered back.

"I want the Kanaka. Drop him an' I'll let up on follerin' ye!"

"You want the earth! If you get the Kanaka, you fight for him!"

"Whoop! I like yer sand 'kase I'm sp'ilin' fer a set-to. Drop the yaller man or I'll put a bullet through ye!"

"The moment you fire I kill the Kanaka, and your bullet will not be swifter than mine."

Handsome Harry gritted his teeth, but he was powerless.

He must pin his faith on a hand-to-hand fight.

Foot by foot he continued to gain upon the gambler.

At last Williams looked around.

Seeing how close to him his pursuer had come, he muttered an oath between his clinched teeth and drew a knife, which he held over the form in front of him.

The moonlight fell upon the blade, and, to Handsome Harry's eyes, it glistened like silver.

"Back!" cried the gambler, hoarsely; "pull in your horse, or I kill the Kanaka as he lies before me!"

But Handsome Harry was too near to victory to suffer himself to be defeated now.

Crack!

He suddenly called into service his marvelous marksmanship.

The knife dropped from the hand that held it, but quick as a flash Williams caught the blade in his left hand, letting the reins fall on his horse's neck.

Once more the glittering steel was lifted.

By this time, however, Handsome Harry was alongside.

An instant later and the descending knife clashed against his own.

Then, transferring the weapon quickly to his left hand, he struck his antagonist a heavy blow that caused him to reel forward in the saddle, but did not unseat him.

Putting forth his great strength in a magnificent effort, the Californian drew the Kanaka from the gambler's horse to his own, and the gambler sped on, without word or movement, and was quickly carried from sight.

"Good-by," said Handsome Harry, "an' good luck to you—but I've got a feelin' that we're goin' ter meet ag'in."

Springing from the saddle, he lifted the Kanaka to the ground and made the discovery that he was still unconscious.

Cutting the yellow man's bonds, Handsome Harry hurried back to a water-hole, a short distance in the rear, scooped up his sombrero full of water, and returned to the spot where he had left the Kanaka.

To his surprise the man was nowhere to be seen.

"Came to himself, I reckon," muttered the Californian, "an' has given me the slip. Anyhow, thar's nothin' ter keep me longer in this section of the country, and the sooner Diming Dick, Jr., gits hold of this information I've got, the better it'll be all around."

Without delaying longer, Handsome Harry turned his horse's head in a more northern direction and hurried rapidly away.

CHAPTER II.

THE CEMETERY VAULT—QUEER DOINGS—THE SPANISH DOUB-
LOON.

"I'll murder you, you good-for-nothing young whelp!"

"Mercy, senor! Ah, Madre de Cristos! I have done nothing!"

On the Southern Pacific road, not many miles from Casa Grande, there is an ancient town settled of old by the Spaniards but which has now passed into the joint possession of Mexicans and Spaniards.

Although the town is small, it has an extensive cemetery.

In the centre of this cemetery, among the rough, primitive crosses, rises a large sandstone vault, heavily guarded at the front with an iron door.

The road from Casa Grande winds past the cemetery, and in the afternoon of the second day following the events recorded in the preceding chapter, a horseman, passing slowly along the trail, had his attention attracted by the gruff voice of a man and the wildly pleading voice of a child.

Pulling in his horse, the young fellow looked around.

Close to the cemetery gate a man and a boy were engaged in a fierce struggle.

The man had an evil face, and it was plain that his intentions were desperate, for he had drawn a knife and seemed only to wait an opportunity for using it to advantage.

"Here's the place for Diamond Dick, Jr., to get in a little fine work," muttered the youth, leaping from his horse and running to the scene of the unequal combat.

So intent upon his fiendish work was the man that he did not notice the youth's approach, and the first intimation he had that a third person was near was a sudden blow on the temple that sent him reeling backward.

The boy, released from his tormentor, sprang hastily to one side, and the man turned upon Diamond Dick, Jr.

"Who are you?" he cried, wrathfully.

"Bertie Wade, otherwise known as Diamond Dick, Jr.," was the cool reply.

"What business have you got interferin' in a little fracas between me an' that boy?"

"I make it my business to protect the weak against the strong wherever I get the opportunity. You're a bully and a coward, or you'd take somebody of your size when you're itching for a fight."

"Mebbe you think that you're about my size, hey?"

"I'm big enough to knock you out in about two seconds, and I'll feel bad if you don't give me a chance to do it."

"I'll kill you," howled the man; "that's what I'll do!"

He sprang toward Diamond Dick, Jr., his knife still in his hand.

Our young hero met him with a well-directed blow on the arm that sent the knife flying; then, quick as a flash, he sprang forward and followed up this initial advantage with all his strength and science.

In less than a minute by the watch the bully was lying on the ground in a senseless condition.

When he finally recovered and got slowly upon his feet Diamond Dick, Jr., calmly asked him if he wanted some more.

The fellow scowled and limped away to his horse, which was standing near.

A moment later he was in the saddle and riding away at a gallop.

"You saved my life, senor," said the Mexican boy, coming up and catching Bertie by the hand.

"I'm glad I did, my boy. Take a little advice from me."

"What is it?"

"Fight shy of that man hereafter."

"I can't, senor."

"Why not?"

"Because he's my father."

"Then get another father. What's your name?"

"Pedro Monte."

"And your father is—"

"Jose Monte, better known as Mexican Monte."

"What was he doing here?"

The boy was silent for a moment; then he said:

"He came to the cemetery."

"What for?"

"That I cannot tell, senor—I would be flayed alive. But I will say this: He visits that sandstone vault over there."

"Does it belong to him?"

"He had it built and said that whenever a pauper died or a friendless man met his death in anyway he should be taken to that vault."

"Very good of your father. Is the vault used much?"

"Three or four times every week the funeral wagon drives up here with a coffin, but mark this, senor—never yet has the body of one dead been inside that vault!"

"Strange!"

"It would not be so strange to you, senor, if you knew all. But I must not stop here longer. Another funeral is coming this way, and, as you say, I must fight shy of my father. I hope I will see you again, senor. Adios!"

"Adios!" said Bertie, and the boy hurried away.

"Handsome Harry told me," muttered Diamond Dick, Jr., reflectively, "that this Mexican Monte was working some big scheme and that Black Bruce was eager to catch onto it. Perhaps I can discover what it is. I'll try it, anyhow."

Across the plain Bertie could see the slowly approaching "funeral wagon," as young Monte had called it.

It was a very strong, broad-tired vehicle, and three men were seated in it.

One man was driving, and all sat on the coffin, which could be distinctly seen above the side-boards of the wagon-box.

Mounting his horse, Bertie rode quickly off into a chaparral of mesquite and greasewood, where he could watch the proceedings unseen.

As the wagon halted at the cemetery gate, Mexican Monte leaped down and preceded it into the yard.

A few moments later the vehicle came to a stand-still at the vault. Monte thereupon threw open the iron door.

The casket, a rough affair made of pine boards, was lowered from the wagon by means of a chain and windlass, affixed to the stout dashboard in front.

Then it was mounted on iron rollers and pushed into the vault, two men going with it, and one being left outside on guard.

"That's a pretty heavy corpse," muttered Bertie, "since it is impossible for three lusty men to carry it. What is Mexican Monte's game, anyhow? I don't like the looks of things, and I'll just try to find out."

Tying his horse in the chaparral, Bertie stealthily crept into the cemetery inclosure and worked his way toward the vault from the rear.

The Mexican sentry evidently had not the slightest idea that danger was at hand, for he was calmly rolling a cigarette.

His first intimation of trouble was feeling the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against the back of his neck.

"Speak a word," hissed Bertie, in the fellow's ear, "even so much as a whisper, and your fate is sealed!"

The Mexican gave a start of consternation, but one look into Bertie's eyes proved that he meant what he said.

"Get into the wagon," commanded Bertie.

The Mexican did so, and our hero tied him with a piece of rope cut from the coil about the windlass.

This done, the youth inserted a secure gag between his prisoner's jaws, and stepped down from the wagon.

"Now for the vault," he muttered, as he advanced and softly pushed open the iron door.

Stepping inside, Diamond Dick, Jr., quickly closed the door behind him.

He found himself in Stygian darkness.

Slowly and noiselessly he began groping his way along and almost fell down a flight of stone steps.

These he descended cautiously.

As he passed down the darkness gradually gave place to light, and finally, as the winding descent ceased, he heard voices close at hand, and a bright radiance was all about him.

A partition of stone separated Bertie from the room in which Monte and his companion were at work.

Around this abutment the youth crept, and a queer scene met his eyes.

A bright fire was glowing in one end of the room fanned to an intense heat by a bellows something like that used by a blacksmith in his forge.

Above the flame was a large vessel, white hot from the fire.

At one side stood the supposed coffin, its top having been wrenched off.

From this box, from time to time, Mexican Monte took small yellow bars and threw them into the melting pot; then, with an iron ladle, he would dip out the molten yellow metal and run it into molds.

This was queer work.

Diamond Dick, Jr., could not understand it.

At first he thought Mexican Monte was a counterfeiter, but the more he studied the scene being enacted before his eyes, the less he thought that this surmise was the correct one.

The two men were talking constantly, but they used the base Spanish common to the lower classes of Mexicans.

Bertie was able to make out a few words, such as "Casa Grande," "doublons," etc., but could learn nothing of Mexican Monte's purpose.

On a table, in one corner, was a heap of glittering coins, evidently but recently turned from the molds.

After a time, Monte sat down at the table, uncorked a large bottle of acid, and began treating the coins with it.

The instant the acid touched the yellow metal, it was turned from its glittering brightness to a dirty brown color.

Wishing to observe this process more closely, Bertie crawled carefully around the wall of the room behind a barricade of empty casks and finally reached a spot where he could oversee the entire process.

What could be the meaning of this strange proceeding?

Why did Mexican Monte wish to give his bright coins that tarnished appearance?

While the youth was pondering this question in his mind Monte suddenly rose from the table, looked toward his companion, and placed a finger on his lips.

Bertie wondered if it were possible that his presence had been detected, and was about to draw his revolvers and face the two men, when suddenly, in obedience to a signal from Monte, the other man extinguished the fire and the lamp at the same time.

The interior of the place was immediately plunged in darkness.

Then for several moments all was silence.

For some time Bertie lay behind the casks awaiting developments.

At last the voice of Monte echoed through the room, speaking this time in English.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., you played a bold game, but you have been discovered. You have made yourself doubly an enemy of mine, but by penetrating into the interior of this vault and observing me at work you have brought upon yourself your earthly doom. You are to die. The gas shall smother you!"

With a cry of defiance, Bertie leaped to his feet.

The only sound that reached his ears was that of a closing door.

He had matches in his pocket, and he hastily lighted one.

As the flickering glare showed him his surroundings, he saw that he was alone in the room.

Monte and his companion had disappeared.

The lamp still stood on the table, however, and Bertie lighted it.

Close to the lamp was the heap of tarnished coins.

They were of antique appearance and bore an ancient date.

Bertie put a handful of them into his pocket and turned to examine the melting-pot and the molds.

As he did so he became aware of a peculiar odor that was gradually filling the room.

Could it be the gas which Monte had said was to cause the youth's death?

The flame of the lamp died down, sputtered, and finally went out.

The gas had extinguished it.

There was no doubt but that the Mexican had spoken the truth in declaring his stern intentions.

Realizing that death was staring him in the face, Bertie groped his way to the door by which he had entered the place and sought to open it.

In vain, however.

It was securely fastened.

He endeavored to find some other means of exit, but his search was of short duration, for the gas was beginning to benumb his senses and to rob him of his strength.

At last, with a dizzy brain and nerveless limbs, he fell upon the hard stone floor of the vault and lay there silent and motionless.

He had nearly given himself up, and his senses had all but fled when he heard a sound as of an opening door, and a draught of cold air blew over him.

The fresh air revived him almost instantly, and he sat up.

"Are you there, senor?"

It was the voice of the boy, Pedro Monte.

"Yes," returned Bertie. "Is that you, Pedro?"

"Si, senor. But do not talk so loud. Speak in a whisper. I have come to save you. You must go with me at once."

"How are we to get out of this hole in the ground?"

"Just as I came in."

"Through the iron door in front?"

"No, that would be impossible. We will go out through a grave in the rear."

"Through a grave? What do you mean?"

"My father is very shrewd. If he should ever be brought to bay here, he planned a method of retreat that would probably save his life. I used the secret passage in coming to you. But it is dangerous to remain here longer. Take my hand, senor; I will lead you out."

Diamond Dick, Jr., made his way to the boy's side and was led through a small opening and along a narrow passage with which Pedro seemed to be perfectly familiar.

The boy finally halted.

"We have reached the end of the passage, senor," he said, "and are in the grave I spoke to you about. Remain here while I climb up and see if it is possible for you to make your escape now."

The boy climbed up a ladder, and a short time after a flood of light broke into the place from above.

The top of the grave was a hinged door, covered with turf in such a manner as to deceive the sharpest eye.

Pedro had lifted this hinged door, and the flood of light was the consequence.

"Peste!" exclaimed the boy.

"What's the matter?" asked Bertie.

"They have gone."

"Good! That makes my escape an easy matter. Where do you think your father has gone?"

"To Maricopa."

"Why? It seems strange that he should leave me alone in the vault."

"He counted upon the gas doing its work. Now that I think of it, the detective is in Maricopa this afternoon."

"What detective?"

"The United States Government's detective."

"What is he there for?"

"To arrest Comet Kate, of Calabasas, for stealing the Indian funds at Tucson."

An exclamation of anger escaped Diamond Dick, Jr.

"Is that why your father went to Maricopa?"

"Si, senor."

"What has he got to do with the matter?"

"That is something I know nothing about. But come! Let us get out of here while we have the chance. For me to be caught assisting you to escape would mean instant death."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Diamond Dick, Jr., as he started up the ladder. "You're a plucky boy, Pedro, and I'm glad I saved you from your father this morning."

"Say nothing, senior. We are even now, eh?"

"Yes."

As Diamond Dick, Jr., emerged from the sham grave Pedro dropped the cover back into place.

"That's quite a clever dodge of your father's," went on Bertie.

"He's full of clever dodges," returned Pedro, with some sarcasm.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Start for Mexico. I have relatives there who think more of me than my father does."

Bertie handed him some money.

"Take this, my boy. It will defray your expenses."

Pedro thanked his new-found friend, put the money in his pocket, and they parted with a cordial hand-shake.

Hurrying to the chaparral, Bertie untied his horse and sprang into the saddle.

"Now for Maricopa," he muttered, "and to see what I can do toward saving Comet Kate from her enemies."

Half an hour later our hero galloped into the town.

In front of a hotel, on the one main street of the town, he saw a group of men who were evidently discussing some interesting topic.

Dismounting and hitching his horse, Bertie approached the crowd.

"What's the matter?" asked the youth of a man who stood near.

The man pointed to a broken window in the second story of the hotel.

"Thar's been a fracas in thar," replied the man.

"Any one hurt?"

"No; Comet Kate fought like a wild-cat."

"So Comet Kate, of Calabasas, was in the scrimmage, hey?"

"Yes. A Gov'ment detective claims he's made a mighty big haul."

"How's that?"

"He's arrested Comet Kate fer stealin' the Indian funds at Tucson."

A dark frown came over Bertie's forehead.

"Where was Comet Kate taken?"

"She's tied hand and foot an' locked up in a room in that hotel. She's goin' to be taken to Phoenix on the night train."

"She'll not be taken to Phoenix on the night train," said Bertie to himself, as he turned away and entered the hotel.

He had little trouble in finding the room in which Comet Kate was imprisoned.

A man stood on guard before the door.

"Comet Kate is confined in that room, isn't she?" queried Bertie.

"Yes," replied the guard, shortly.

"I wish to speak with her. Will you let me in?"

"Got orders not to let any one in."

"But it's important. I must see her at once."

"I can't help that. You can't see her."

Bertie turned away.

The two rooms on each side of the one occupied by Comet Kate were supposed to be empty, and the doors had been locked.

The third door down the hall, however, was standing open, and Diamond Dick, Jr., unseen by the guard, slipped through it.

This room was, evidently occupied by some cowboy, for his saddle lay in one corner, and attached to the pommel was a coiled riata.

Determined to assist Comet Kate to escape, and having an idea that the rope might come in handy, Bertie secured possession of it.

Advancing to the window, he pushed up the sash and looked out.

This tier of rooms was in the rear of the hotel and overlooked the alley.

The window of the next room—that is, of the room adjoining the one in which Comet Kate lay bound and helpless—was not more than three feet from the window out of which Diamond Dick, Jr., was looking, and a daring idea came into his head.

He was not slow in carrying it out.

Crawling through the window, he clung to its edge with

one hand while he stretched out his foot and placed it on the sill of the next window.

Then balancing himself for a moment, he stooped over sideways and lifted the sash.

After a few seconds of deft but dangerous work, he managed to make his way into the second room.

The window of the room in which Comet Kate was confined was too far from the second window for him to make his way to it, and if he entered the prison chamber, it must be by some other means.

Bertie cast his eyes critically about the room in which he now found himself.

There were a table and two chairs in it, and the ceiling was made of canvas stretched tightly across from partition to partition, after the fashion of many Arizona houses.

The youth had an idea.

Hastily drawing the table to the wall nearest to Comet Kate, he piled the two chairs upon it and carefully mounted them.

This brought his shoulders to the ceiling.

Drawing his knife, he cut a cross-like slit in the canvas and shoved his head through the opening.

Scarcely more than two feet above his head were the wooden rafters of the roof.

To one of these rafters he attached an end of the rope he had brought with him; then leaning forward, he cut a hole in the cloth ceiling of Comet Kate's prison-chamber.

Looking down, he saw the girl sitting in a chair, securely bound.

As he looked at her she looked up, and their eyes met.

A flush of happiness came over Comet Kate's face, and she opened her mouth to speak, but Diamond Dick, Jr., placed a warning finger on his lips.

"I know that you are not guilty of the charge brought against you by this detective," whispered Bertie, "and I have come to rescue you, Comet Kate. Casa Grande is still a mystery to me, but that has nothing to do with the matter."

While speaking he had been lowering the rope through the rent in the canvas.

"If you rescue me," she returned, "Casa Grande shall no longer be a mystery to you. I will tell you all."

"We will talk of that some other time," returned Bertie, as he slipped lightly down the rope.

A moment later he was at the girl's side and had her released from her bonds.

"Now," he went on, "we have no time to waste. There is a guard posted just outside the door, and it will be impossible for you to make your escape in that direction, so you will have to go out as I came in."

"And you?"

"Never mind me. I will follow you. But listen! Climb this rope and you will find a hole through the ceiling of the room next to this into which you can descend by means of a table and a couple of chairs which I have piled up there. The window of this room is such a short distance from the window of the next that you can easily pass from one to the other. The door of that second room is open. Watch your opportunity, pass through it, and take my horse—the black which is hitched in front of this hotel—and make your way to the Red Coulee on the Casa Grande road. Wait for me there."

"You will surely follow?"

"Yes."

"But if you should be discovered?"

"What if I am discovered? They can do nothing with me, for I have done nothing. Hurry!"

"Just as you say, Diamond Dick, Jr., but I will never forget the service you have rendered me to-day."

Bertie made no answer, and the girl catching the rope firmly, mounted it with the agility of an athlete.

She finally disappeared through the rent above.

At this precise moment Bertie heard a suggestive movement in the hall outside.

Some one was advancing to the door of the room.

"Comet Kate!" whispered Bertie.

"What is it?" returned the girl, looking down at him.

"Is some one coming?"

"Yes; pull up this rope."

"Why?"

"It will excite suspicion."

"How will you escape?"

A key had been thrust into the lock outside.

"Never mind," was the somewhat stern reply. "Draw up that rope and make your own escape. Meet me at the Red Coulee as I told you."

Comet Kate did not demur further.

Just as the end of the rope disappeared through the rent in the ceiling the door opened, and a man entered.

At the sight of Diamond Dick, Jr., he was overwhelmed with consternation.

"Whar—whar—whar's Comet Kate?" he stuttered.

"That's all right," answered Bertie, bringing his revolvers to bear. "Keep your hands in front of you, and if you speak louder than a whisper, I'll make a lead mine out of your carcass. Do I talk plain enough?"

"But I—I—"

"Whisper!" hissed Bertie.

"Whar's the gal?"

"Skipped!"

"She's gotter be stopped."

"No, she hasn't, nor she isn't going to be stopped, either."

"Who are ye, anyhow?"

"Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Sho! Blame it all, that gal's a thief!"

"You're another! Are you the Government detective?"

"No—but I'm his pard. He'll be yere in a minit."

"Then I'll cover him, too!" was the youth's calm reply.

"Mebbe ye'll have yer hands a little more'n full. How'd Comet Kate manage to vamoose?"

"That you'll have to guess."

"I reckon I— By thunder! here he comes now."

"Who?"

"The detective you was inquiren' fer."

Bertie turned a little so that he could command the door with one of his revolvers.

The steps in the hall gradually drew nearer, and at last a tall, lightly built man entered the room and stood rooted to the floor in surprise.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was also surprised, for this detective was well known to him; in fact, they had been thrown together not many weeks before, while running down the outlaw known as Colonel Taylor, the Bravo of Bullet Bend.

"Diamond Dick, Jr.!" exclaimed the detective.

"Tom Barnes, or I'm a Chinaman!" replied our hero, with a quiet smile. "Hands up, Tom!"

"What do you mean, Bertie?"

"Business! Are you a Government detective, Barnes?"

"For the time being. But where's Comet Kate?"

"I assisted her to make her escape. Kindly bend your eyes upon that hole in the ceiling."

"You—helped—her—to—escape!" gasped Barnes.

"Yes."

"Why the duse did you do that?"

"Look here, Tom," said Bertie, calmly putting up his guns, "you've been acting the tenderfoot."

"How?"

"Comet Kate never stole that money at Tucson."

"She used to be a poor girl, and now she's spending thousands right and left. Suspicious, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then, again, she began spending the money on the day after the hold-up."

"That may all be, but I tell you that you're dead wrong. I know who worked that job, and they are the ones who are trying to throw suspicion on Comet Kate. They are trying to shield themselves."

"Are you positive of all this?"

"You know me of old, Barnes," replied Bertie. "I'm not given to making statements that I cannot prove, am I?"

"No."

"Now, then, stand where you are and cast your eyes out of the window. Do you see a man in the alley, looking up at these windows?"

"Yes—it's Mexican Monte."

"You know him?"

"By sight only. He put me onto the fact that Comet Kate was in Maricopa."

"Oh, he did! Turn your eyes toward that fence behind Mexican Monte."

"I've done so."

"Do you see a crouching form there?"

"By George! I do. A man who wears a black coat."

"Exactly! Well, three men robbed the Government at Tucson and one of them was that man in the black coat. Will you take my word for this and cease your attempts to capture Comet Kate?"

"Certainly."

Turning to the man who had first entered the room, Barnes went on:

"Gordon, shadow that man in the black coat."

Gordon left the room without a word.

"I am sorry I did not know some time ago that it was Tom Barnes who had captured Comet Kate. It would have saved me considerable trouble."

"It would, indeed. I have been acquainted with you long enough to know that you do not make a statement such as you have just made on any but the most substantial grounds."

"Involving, as it does, your professional reputation as well as the guilt or innocence of Comet Kate, you may be sure I would not treat the matter lightly. But tell me where did you first meet this man, Mexican Monte?"

"In Casa Grande."

"What was he doing there?"

"He owns a stage and a mule team and has a man there to take visitors to the old ruins."

"He does not drive a thriving trade, I fancy."

"Oh, he makes the trip two or three times a week."

"When does he go again?"

"Probably to-morrow."

"Good!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., grew reflective.

"Are you thinking of something, my boy?" asked the detective.

"Yes; the capture of the ringleaders who stole the Tucson money."

"How will you do it?"

"I'll say nothing about it, just now, but let me give you a pointer."

"What's that?"

"Make it a point, to-morrow afternoon, to be out of sight somewhere near the ruins."

"Shall I go alone?"

"Take only those whom you can trust. Remember, it would be difficult to keep too many men concealed."

"Very well."

"I'm in a big hurry," added Bertie, starting from the room. "We'll meet very soon again, Barnes."

After leaving the hotel Diamond Dick, Jr., secured a horse and rode rapidly in the direction of the Red Coulee.

Comet Kate was waiting for him.

"Ah," she said, riding out into the trail, "you are here and I am safe."

"You have nothing further to fear from the Government, Comet Kate."

Have you explained the matter so that the detective is satisfied I am innocent?"

"That's it."

An expression of gratitude broke over the girl's face.

"It is only another obligation I am under to you," she said.

"That's all right," returned Bertie, hastily. "Have you forgotten everything that passed between us since we first met?"

"I have forgotten nothing."

"Let me go over it, however, for your benefit as well as for mine. We met first in the Road-to-Ruin, where a man known as Professor Pliocene nearly lost his life."

"You saved him and came into possession of a skull, a prehistoric relic, on the frontal bone of which was a diagram. If I am not mistaken, that diagram located a hidden treasure when correctly traced out."

"You read the symbol when Pliocene, with all his learning, could not do so. Wishing to have the entire treasure for his own, this Pliocene plotted against you; you frustrated him and thenceforth he became your enemy. At last he unwittingly rendered you a service and

you bought his interest in the Casa Grande treasure for one hundred thousand dollars. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"All this time a man who went by the name of Black Bruce and professed to be a lover of yours had been doing everything in his power to wrest from you the secret you so jealously guarded. So far, however, you have been successful in baffling him."

"Right. Professor Pliocene found that prehistoric skull buried beneath the rock inscriptions in Salt River Valley. He read the descriptions and in this way discovered the value of the diagram traced on the skull. The inscriptions said nothing about treasure, however. The professor merely guessed that some of the early Spaniards had hidden their treasure there."

"Was he right?"

"Yes."

"Comet Kate, is this some of the treasure?"

As Bertie spoke he drew from his pocket the handful of Spanish "doubloons" and presented them to the girl's astonished eyes.

"You have been there!" she gasped; "you have solved the mystery of Casa Grande!"

"Not so," was Diamond Dick, Jr.'s quiet reply, "and neither have you—but I will solve the mystery long before you do."

"But you must have gotten those coins from the ruins near Casa Grande."

"You are mistaken. I have never been within twenty-five miles of the ruins you speak of."

"How strange this is! I can hardly believe what you tell me."

"Comet Kate," said Bertie, earnestly, "I have only the friendliest of feelings toward you, and knowing only as much as I do of this supposed Spanish treasure, I would like to proffer a little advice."

"What is it?"

"First, please tell me how much of that gold you have spent."

"Not more than three hundred thousand dollars."

"Then at the earliest possible moment take as much more of the treasure as will keep you comfortably through life—one hundred thousand dollars ought to be enough—and then disappear quickly and thoroughly from this section of the country and nevermore return."

"Why?" she asked, overwhelmed with surprise.

"Because I fear complications that will entangle you. Cease your foolish attempt to rival the lavish expenditures of the Count of Monte Cristo. Such doings can only serve to keep you under constant suspicion."

Comet Kate thought over the matter long and seriously.

"Why is it that my spending money lavishly keeps me under constant suspicion?"

Bertie thereupon explained to her how Black Bruce had thrown upon her the suspicion of being concerned in the robbery of Government funds at Tucson—simply because but a short time after that robbery she had begun spending money with so lavish a hand.

Once more Comet Kate bowed her head in thought.

At last she said, looking up and extending her hand:

"Diamond Dick, Jr., I'm going to take your advice, for if I do not, I have a presentiment that evil will befall me. I must make one more visit to the ruins, however."

"For the purpose of securing the hundred thousand?"

"Yes."

"When will you go?"

"To-night."

"Will you go alone?"

"My Kanaka will accompany me."

"Can you meet me in the ruins to-morrow night at nine o'clock?"

"You know the way there?"

"No; but I will find it."

"Where will you meet me?"

"At the place where the treasure is."

She looked at him strangely for a moment.

"Very well," she said. "Do you want your horse?"

"No; you keep it. It is one that formerly belonged to Black Bruce. Good-by, Comet Kate, until we meet again."

"You must leave at once?"

"Yes; I have business in Maricopa and must hurry back."

He waved his hand to her and galloped off while she watched him out of sight with a sad smile on her beautiful face.

"So," she muttered, "we must part forever! What care I for all the gold in Casa Grande? I would give up every ounce of it cheerfully for his sake, but it cannot be—it cannot be."

CHAPTER III.

RUBE RACKET OF HOOP-POLE TOWNSHIP—THE RUINS—A DUEL IN A MOLE-BURROW.

As Rube Racket walked down the main street in Casa Grande, headed for the livery-stable, the hay-seed was sticking out all over him.

He had red chin whiskers and red hair.

In one hand he carried a big umbrella, and in the other a carpet-bag of generous dimensions and seedy appearance.

His trousers were too short to connect with his number eleven shoes and a stretch of yarn socks was visible to the naked eye.

As he stopped in front of the stable he addressed himself to the proprietor who was smoking his pipe in the shade.

"Be you the man that runs that 'ere stage to them old ruins?"

"I an't the man, Rube, but the wagon starts from here."

"I'll be gol durned if I an't glad I've found the place. When does she start?"

"They're hitchin' up now."

"Bully! Quicker I git started, the better. Reckon there's a hull lot to see over to them ruins, hey?"

"Naw. Nothin' but a pile of old adobe."

"Wall, I'm goin' ter see 'em anyhow. Said when I left hum I was goin' to see everythin' there was to be seen, an' I don't keer if there an't nothin' there, I'll go up an' look the thing over, jest the same. Say, mister."

"Well?"

"Who are them two fellers walkin' long the street?"

Rube Racket pointed out the men with his umbrella as he spoke.

"They're two detectives."

"Sho! What are they doin' here?"

"Somebody's been robbin' a mine in Mexico an' dumpin' the swag over in this country somewhere. They're lookin' for the stuff an' for the feller that did the stealin'."

"Do tell! Who owns the mine?"

"Man by the name of Carvallo. He's here with the detectives."

"Have they got any idee who stole the stuff?"

"No."

Just then the stage drove up.

Mexican Monte was on the front seat with a driver beside him.

He gave a swift, peculiar glance at the detectives and then turned to Rube Racket.

"Are you going to the ruins?"

"That's what I be."

"Jump in, then. This is the wagon that takes you there."

The farmer sprang into the vehicle.

The driver cracked his whip, and the mules started off at a swinging trot.

"That feed isn't in your way, is it?" queried Mexican Monte, looking back at the farmer on the rear seat and pointing to two stout canvas bags on the floor of the wagon bed.

"No; it an't in my way," replied the farmer.

Mexican Monte turned around again and talked in Spanish with the driver.

Rube Racket kicked his foot against one of the bags.

It gave out a musical chink.

"Wonder what kind of feed them mules eat?" thought the farmer. "They must have cast-iron stummicks, 'cause if that an't metal I'm a goslin'."

For a time they rode on in silence.

The farmer kept his keen eyes bent on Mexican Monte, and not a move on the part of that individual escaped him.

At last Monte turned.

"Do you see those queer-looking hummocks over there, stranger?"

"Ya-as, I see 'em. What be they, anyhow?"

"Ruins."

"Gawsh all hemlocks! I could come purty nigh turnin' up a furrer as big as them, with my ole plow to hum."

"They'll get bigger as we get closer."

They finally came to a halt close to the adobe walls.

"Here we are, pilgrim," said Monte, leaping down. "You can just poke around and see your fill while Carlos and I take care of the mule fodder."

"I'll do it; but are them two jacks goin' ter eat the stuff in them bags?"

"Certainly; why not?"

Monte gave the farmer a swift look of suspicion.

"Oh, I didn't know an' jest wanted ter find out. So these are the ruins as was ruins in the days when the Spaniards diskivered the kentry! Well, well, well! Have ye got any set time fer startin' back to town?"

"We'll start back in a couple of hours so as to get you into Casa Grande in time for supper."

"That'll be quick enough fer me," replied Rube.

Then, looking about him in open-mouthed wonder, he wandered off among the ruins and soon lost himself to the eyes of Mexican Monte and Carlos. But Mexican Monte and Carlos were not lost to his eyes, for occasionally he would scale a section of the tumble-down adobe wall and look toward the wagon.

Mexican Monte and Carlos were unloading the bags of "feed."

It took both of them to lift one of the bags from the wagon and then they had more than they could manage.

"What are they going to do with it?" thought the farmer.

While he was intently gazing at the two men he heard a voice behind him.

"Hey, there!"

From his perch on the top of the wall, Rube Racket looked down at the man who had addressed him.

It was Tom Barnes, the detective.

"Who be you?"

The detective laughed.

"Come off, Bertie! I would never have pierced your disguise had not your evident anxiety to keep track of Monte given you away. Come down."

"In just a minute."

Bertie gave another look in the direction of Monte and Carlos.

The bags of "feed" had disappeared and were nowhere to be seen.

Bertie made no remark regarding this strange condition of things but dropped down beside his friend.

"You're on hand in great shape, Barnes."

"I told you I would be."

"Where are you hiding?"

"In here."

He led Bertie into a kind of niche in the wall, concealed by a pile of *debris* that had tumbled down in front of it.

"Have you been here long?" asked Bertie.

"Two or three hours."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes. I didn't know but I might find Gordon, but he hasn't shown up."

"Where's your horse?"

"Hitched in an arroyo about a quarter of a mile from here."

"Ah!"

Bertie bent his keen eyes upon the detective, "sizing him up" from head to foot.

"What's the matter now?" queried the detective, with a slight smile.

"I've got a pile of work laid out for you, my boy," replied Bertie, as he began taking off his disguise. "You're about my height and build, and you'll have to ride back with Mexican Monte in my place."

"What do you mena? Make him think I am you?"

"Exactly."

"Impossible!"

"No, not impossible. You can do the trick easily. Your face and mine are not a very good match, perhaps, but

this wig and these whiskers will do their part if you pretend to be cold and turn your coat-collar up about your neck. You're a detective, Barnes, and have done this kind of work before, so it ought to come easy to you."

"All right, I'll do my best. We're taking long chances, however, and if anything unforeseen happens and Monte suspects me?"

"No matter what happens, keep right on to Casa Grande and do the rest of the work I have laid out for you. You see, I have work to do here and I don't want Monte to catch onto the fact that I have remained behind."

"I see; but what other work am I to do?"

Bertie was thoughtful for a few moments.

"It will be a hard job for you, Barnes, and a mighty delicate one. From what I've seen of you, however, I believe you're equal to the emergency. You see, there are two detectives and a rich Mexican in Casa Grande, and they have come to this section looking for a fellow who has been systematically robbing the rich Mexican's mine."

"I know all about that."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Who told you?"

"Mexican Monte."

Bertie laughed.

"Monte is a friend of Carvallo's—the rich Mexican," explained Barnes.

"I see."

"Carvallo has been missing his gold in chunks until now there is over a million gone. The thieving has been very skillfully done, however, and Carvallo hasn't the slightest idea who could have done it, but he thinks the booty was carted across the Rio Grande, and that's why he's here."

"His mine is a very rich one?"

"It has been worked since the days of the Montezumas and is one of the richest in all Mexico."

"I think I know where that missing gold is, Barnes."

"What—you?"

"Yes. I also believe that I can place my hands on the thief."

"Incredible!"

"Perhaps I am wrong, but I am gong to let you put the matter to the proof, and you must do it as quickly as possible. You must bring all your professional tact into play in order to carry the deal through successfully."

"What shall I do?"

"Go to Carvallo and tell him that for four hundred thousand dollars you will not only tell him who the thief is, but will prove his guilt beyond all question and will deliver what remains of the gold."

"Four hundred thousand dollars!" gasped the detective.

"Yes," answered our hero, unflinchingly.

"That is a big reward."

"Not a penny less. You must use all your persuasive powers to get Carvallo to accede to this. Tell him you will guarantee to return him twice that much of the stolen gold and that, if he does not come to your terms, the pilfering at the mine will probably go on indefinitely."

"But you never take rewards for any of your brave work, Diamond Dick, Jr.," said the astounded detective.

"And I shall not touch a sou markee, even in this case," replied Bertie.

"I can't understand this at all."

"Wait. You will take a writing from Senor Carvallo promising to pay this four hundred thousand dollars, in the event of your carrying out your promises, to Comet Kate, of Calabasas."

"Heavens! She's already got more money than she knows what to do with. Why, she calls herself the Countess of Monte Cristo—and yet you're going to turn that reward over to her."

"Don't deceive yourself, Barnes. You understand, do you not, that you are not to move a step from Casa Grande until you receive this promise to pay in Comet Kate's name?"

"I understand. What then?"

"Then take Carvallo with you and go to the cemetery near the old Spanish town on the Casa Grande road."

"I know the place. That's where Monte blowed himself for ten thousand dollars to build a vault for the bodies of paupers. Noble chap—very liberal!"

"Very!" returned Diamond Dick, Jr., sarcastically. "Well, take Señor Carvallo to that vault, unknown to any one but you and him."

"This grows mysterious."

"It will get clearer from now on. Break through the iron door of the vault—you had better secure implements for this purpose in Casa Grande and take them with you. Once inside the vault, descend the stairs to the room you will find at the foot of them, and then see if any of the gold bars in the coffin you will discover there bear the stamp of Señor Carvallo's mine."

Barnes drew a long breath.

"This sounds like a fairy tale, Diamond Dick, Jr."

"You will find there is a grim reality to it if you follow out my instructions, but—Hist!"

Bertie suddenly caught his friend's arm and pressed a hand over his mouth.

At that moment Mexican Monte passed by on the other side of the *debris*.

The Mexican walked rapidly and looked neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead.

"Lucky he didn't overhear us talking," muttered Bertie, when Monte had passed out of sight and ear-shot. "You understand everything I have told you, do you, Barnes?"

"Yes; and I am amazed at the knowledge you possess."

"I have had some peculiar experiences during the last twenty-four hours and have merely put this and that together. As a result, I have unearthed one of the cleverest and most complicated swindling games I have ever run across."

"Who is the thief?"

"Can you not guess?"

"Mexican Monte."

"Right! Say little about that, however, until we are ready to close in on him."

"I will say nothing, except to Carvallo."

"In Casa Grande you will find Handsome Harry. Tell him everything and take him with you."

"I will. Is all the gold stored in that supposed vault?"

"No—not a thousandth part of it. To get the rest of the stolen gold you must bring Carvallo here."

"Will I find you here when I come?"

"To be sure. If you do not see me, wait till I appear. As time is precious in the working of this scheme, and you have much to do, I'd advise you to go out and join the wagon at once, Barnes."

"How do I look in this rig?"

"Tip-top. If you pretend to be half drunk and talk in a husky voice, it will add to the deception."

"All right—here goes. You can depend on me, Bertie."

"I know that or I should never have told you what I have."

The two friends parted, Barnes going in the direction of the wagon and Bertie proceeding along in the trail of Mexican Monte.

Finally, after making many devious turns among the shapeless piles of adobe, the youth came to a halt in front of a mound which stretched away in a hill-like formation.

Bertie was startled, for the adobe face of the hill resembled strangely the contour of a human skull.

For the mouth and the V-shaped opening of the nostrils were large cavities; but for the eyes were two concave stones.

As our hero stood looking and wondering in his mind whether this was a freak of nature or the handiwork of man and whether it had anything to do with Comet Kate's prehistoric skull, one of the stones that formed the eye turned in its socket, and a man climbed out.

Bertie dropped out of sight behind a pile of *debris*.

The man who had thus suddenly appeared was none other than Mexican Monte.

"Ah," said Bertie, to himself, "this is a case of eighteen carat luck. The mystery of Casa Grande is now before me. All I have to do is to unravel it—and here goes."

After waiting until Monte had disappeared, Bertie climbed to the top of the hill and saw Monte, Carlos, and Barnes drive away, a large brown bottle circulating between them.

"Good for Barnes," chuckled Bertie; "he evidently goes prepared for such emergencies."

Then picking his way carefully, Diamond Dick, Jr., de-

scended to the eye of the skull through which he had seen Monte make his appearance.

After several moments of hard labor Bertie managed to push one side of the circular rock inward.

A round hole, through which he could barely crawl, was exposed to view.

He drew back reflectively.

It was possible there was a trap inside.

Should he attempt to make the passage?

"Yes," he muttered; "the Mexican crawled through it, and I can do it if he could."

Without giving further thought to the subject, Bertie began burrowing his way through, the stone eye closing into place behind him.

"I'm making a mole of myself," he thought, as he forced his way through the hole inch by inch.

He had not proceeded many feet when he suddenly bumped his head into something.

Could it be the end of the passage?

Had he reached a stone wall?

He put his hands out in front of him to feel the obstacle and thus determine what it was.

Just then, however, a tiny light appeared, and Diamond Dick, Jr., saw a face covered with a black mask.

Well did he know that black domino!

It served to disguise the features of Black Bruce, our hero's sworn enemy.

Bruce Baxter's eyes shone through the holes in his mask with fierce hatred as he discovered his foe so close at hand.

The light that had so suddenly made its appearance was from a tiny electric coil set in the outlaw's necktie and operated by a spring which he managed to press.

"Black Bruce!"

"Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

Both men were overwhelmingly surprised at this chance meeting in such a place.

For a moment they glared at each other.

They had sworn to do battle whenever they should meet, but how were they to fight in that mole-burrow?

It was impossible for either to get at his weapons.

Had they been able to use knife or revolver the conflict in their cramped quarters would have been terrible.

But with only their hands—could they, would they assail each other?

After running head first into each other both had recoiled; but now, with demons leaping from their eyes, with teeth set and faces resolute, they began creeping forward.

"Again we meet, Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

"So it appears."

"A third time in the course of my career in Arizona I challenge you to a duel here and now."

"Your weapons?"

Black Bruce gave a wild laugh that echoed in that narrow compass in thunderous tones.

"Do you see this flower in my button-hole?" he asked.

"This is no time for trifling," returned Bertie, sternly.

"You will find, before I am through, that I am not trifling. Look at that flower!"

Our hero made no reply.

"Now turn your eyes upon this bulb in my hand."

Bertie looked and saw a white rubber ball with a connecting tube leading to the lapel of Baxter's coat and communicating with the flower.

"Well?" queried the youth, impatiently.

"In crawling through this inferno that bulb became displaced and I was obliged to carry it in my hand. It was fortunate for me that I did so."

For a brief space there was silence.

Then Black Bruce went on.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., this bulb is filled with vitriol; when I press it, the burning stuff darts from the petals of the flower and sears as a red-hot iron wherever it strikes. This is my weapon. You may use whatever you have at command."

Could Diamond Dick, Jr., believe his ears?

Was it possible that Black Bruce could make such a demon out of himself?

"If your words are true," said Bertie, in a low, tense

voice, "this is no duel, but a diabolical plan on your part to kill me."

"Call it what you will," was the sneering retort; "the life of an enemy—especially of such an enemy as you have shown yourself to be—I count not so much as the life of a snake that crosses my path."

"You would kill me?"

"As I would a rattler."

"Fortune never prospered such deviltry," returned Bertie, his eyes glittering with the intensity of his feelings. "Do your worst! I will outwit you yet."

"You talk like a bravo. I put your words to the test."

Baxter's long, slender fingers pressed the white bulb.

Instantly a tiny stream shot from the petals of the flower and struck Bertie in the face.

Into his eyes, over his cheeks and forehead the fluid ran, and, with a low groan, the youth buried his face in his hands.

Black Bruce looked gloatingly on.

Quiver after quiver passed through Diamond Dick, Jr.'s form, and finally the stream exhausted itself and he lay as one dead.

"Curses on the luck!" growled Black Bruce. "The pain has rendered him unconscious. I'll just draw him back into the chamber of bones and finish the job. Blind though he is, he could do me much harm still, and now that I have discovered the secret of Casa Grande, I don't propose to be euchred out of my find."

Reaching out his hand, he caught Diamond Dick, Jr., by the collar and drew him along by main force.

A few moments later Black Bruce dropped out of the hole into a large chamber and pulled Diamond Dick, Jr., after him.

As the tiny lamp in his tie did not give enough light, he shut it off and lighted a lamp that swung from a side wall.

The lamp was supported by the bone of a human forearm.

The entire chamber was literally lined with human bones, and in one end of the place was a high, conical tower constructed of skulls.

After lighting the lamp, Black Bruce turned to the place where he had left Diamond Dick, Jr., lying.

To his intense surprise the youth had risen to his feet and was now covering him with his revolvers.

Bertie's eyes glittered fiercely along the diamond sights, and there was no trace of blindness in them.

"Wha—wha—what's the matter?" stuttered Baxter.

"The matter is," replied Bertie, "that for once you have overreached yourself. That rubber bulb did not contain vitriol, but whisky."

"And I can tell ye how it happened, too!"

As these words were spoken a tall form emerged from behind the pile of skulls.

It was Gordon.

Black Bruce turned upon him with an exclamation of surprise.

"Where the blazes did you spring from?" he asked.

"How did you get here, Gordon?" queried Bertie.

"I followed the chap in the black coat," said Gordon.

"How did you manage to get inside these ruins?"

"When the wagon with Mexican Monte in it drove up an' the farmer jay went pokin' off among the adobe walls, Monte took out two bags an' dropped 'em down through a hole that was covered with a big rock. The wagon then drove away, an' Monte put the rock back in place an' folloed the farmer. Black Bruce ran out from the place in which he was hidin', shoved the rock to one side, an' dropped down into the hole himself. I was tight after him."

"When I got down inter this chamber of bones I saw him settin' on a skull with that rubber arrangement in his hand which he was fillin' from a bottle he took from his pocket. 'Vitriol,' he sez, aloud; 'I reckon this'll fix Monte if he tries ter do anythin' to me.' Jest then he heard a noise and set down the rubber bulb an' went off to investigate. Not knowin' but he'd have a chance ter use that infernal machine on me, 'stead of Monte, I slipped out, emptied the vitriol out of the thing, an' filled it with whisky from my flask. So that's all thar is to it."

"You saved my eyesight, Gordon," said Bertie.

"And I'll play even with him for doing it," gritted Baxter.

"Say," said Gordon, "you better hesh up an'——"

Gordon got no further.

At this particular moment two white objects shot through the air with unerring aim, and both Bertie and the detective were felled to the floor.

Before they could struggle to their feet two men ran out and threw themselves upon them.

The two new-comers were Williams and Birdsall.

Gordon was rendered unconscious by the blow he had received, but Bertie struggled against his three assailants, and it required all their strength to reduce him to subjection.

He was finally tied securely, and the three outlaws next gave their attention to Gordon.

"I thought it was about time you fellows showed up," said Black Bruce.

"It looks as though we'd gotten here just about in the nick of time," said Williams.

"So you did."

"That young fellow is Diamond Dick, Jr., is he?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"What I do with all my enemies when I once get them into my power," was the significant answer.

Birdsall shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't get your hands too red," he said. "It's a bad thing to have the gallows in front of you."

"That's my business."

"I'm glad it isn't mine. So this is the gold mine, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where's the gold?"

"It's here somewhere. We'll have to hunt for it."

"Where are you going to look?"

"Do you see that hole in the wall?" returned Baxter, pointing to the mole-burrow that passed to the eye of the skull.

"Yes."

"Well, I have an idea that that leads to the treasure. I started in to explore it a short time ago and ran onto Diamond Dick, Jr. If you fellows are agreeable, we'll try to explore it now."

"Leave the prisoners here?"

"Certainly. They'll be safe. Follow me."

Black Bruce got into the hole and crawled out of sight.

He was followed by the two gamblers, one after the other.

When the second gambler had disappeared two more persons stepped out from behind the pyramid of skulls.

They were Comet Kate and her slave, the Kanaka.

Motioning toward the hole through which the second gambler had just disappeared, Comet Kate said a few words to the Kanaka, and he drew a long, wicked-looking knife and stationed himself beside the aperture.

"It is only eight o'clock," said Comet Kate to Diamond Dick, Jr. "I am an hour ahead of time."

"I'm glad of it," returned Bertie, as the girl bent over him and cut his bonds, afterward performing a like service for Gordon.

"Comet Kake!" gasped the detective.

"The same," she answered.

Bertie had taken a note-book and pencil from his pocket and seated himself on a pile of bones.

He was now busily writing.

"Black Bruce," went on Comet Kate, "has finally discovered the secret of Casa Grande!"

"He thinks he has," replied Bertie, without looking up.

"He has gone into that hole looking for the gold," went on the girl, with a laugh. "He'll never find it there. You said you would meet me where the treasure was, Diamond Dick, Jr., and you have done so."

"I'm glad of that, for I haven't the slightest idea where the stuff is."

"Is it possible you do not know that the gold is in this very room, which is called the Hall of the Catacombs?"

"If it's here, Comet Kate, where is it?"

For answer she stepped to the pile of skulls and removed one.

Underneath it could be seen a pile of glittering coins.

"You wished me to give up all this for Black Bruce," she said, reproachfully.

"Not so," replied Bertie, "for Black Bruce will never touch one of those coins. Did you come here last night?"

"Yes."

"And you took—"

"Fifty thousand. Upon thinking the matter over I thought a hundred thousand would be too much. I have been very foolish."

Bertie caught her hand and shook it cordially.

"All you have taken, then, amounts to less than four hundred thousand?"

"Yes."

"Please sign this."

He tore from his note-book the sheet on which he had been writing and presented it to her with his lead-pencil.

Comet Kate read as follows:

"Received of Senor Carvallo four hundred thousand (\$400,000) dollars as reward for finding the man who stole the gold from his Mexican mine and for returning balance of the booty to him."

"What's this?" cried Comet Kate. "I do not understand what it means."

"Sign it," said Bertie, "and I will explain."

The girl hesitated a moment and then attached her name to the paper and handed it back to Bertie.

"Now," she said, "what is it all about?"

"You believe the gold under that pile of skulls to be a very ancient Spanish treasure, do you not, Comet Kate?"

"Yes. The money is all in the form of old Spanish doubloons."

"Exactly. Now did you ever hear of a man called Mexican Monte?"

"He runs a stage from Casa Grande out here; he also built a vault for paupers near the old Spanish town, and, I understand, is superintendent or something or other in a mine across the Rio Grande."

"In addition to his many bright and shining virtues," said Bertie, "Senor Monte is one of the biggest thieves on record. He has made use of the responsible position he holds in Senor Carvallo's Mexican mine to systematically rob it of hundreds of thousands. This gold, fresh from the mine, was loaded into coffins and carried to the vault in the cemetery on the Casa Grande road. There the coffin was unloaded and carried down into the vault. Here this gold was transformed from bars into Spanish doubloons and the coins were tarnished with acid to give them an aged appearance. After that the coin was brought out here in sacks as horse feed and stored away under that mound of skulls."

"Diamond Dick, Jr.," cried the girl, "is all this true that you are telling me?"

"True as gospel. But wait—see what a consummate rogue our friend Monte is. Why does he recast these gold bars into old Spanish doubloons? Why, so that when he has accumulated enough treasure he may announce that he has come into the wealth of some of the old conquistadores and no one can question the honesty of his suddenly acquired riches. Ah, it was a clever scheme!"

"But I have been spending stolen money—money that did not belong to me!"

"So you have."

"They can arrest me for that."

"No, they can't."

"Why not?"

"Simply because I have persuaded Senor Carvallo to offer a reward of four hundred thousand dollars for the capture of the thief and the return of the gold."

"Well?"

"You discovered the gold, and through that discovery the thief was found—I being the humble instrument. You have simply taken your payment in advance and I hold your receipt. Are you satisfied?"

"Diamond Dick, Jr.," cried the girl, "you have saved me from prison—you have saved me from the consequences of my own folly; in addition to that, you have made me independent for life. How can I ever repay you?"

"You can repay me by doing two things, Comet Kate."

"What are they?"

"Never again speak of being under an obligation to me, that's one of the things. The other is this: Leave this part of the country forever at once. I do not know what your real name is and do not tell me. When you are far from here assume it and be happy."

The girl bent her eyes on the ground and was thoughtful for a few moments.

Then she looked up suddenly.

"And you—you do not want me to stay?" she faltered.

Bertie shook his head.

"I fear to have you—fear for your own sake. You must go at once—this instant—it is better for you."

"It shall be so," she said, in a low tone, as she caught his hand and wrung it. "I shall never forget you and what you have done for me, however."

Then she motioned to the Kanaka and started away.

The yellow man sheathed his long, wicked-looking knife and glided after his mistress.

They disappeared, and then—all was silence.

Bertie was deep in his thoughts, but his reflection was interrupted by Gordon.

"Did I dream all this, or didn't I?"

"You're as wide awake as I am," returned Bertie; "but if you can't understand it all, you might think, for the time being, that it's a dream. But listen! Our friends are coming back through that hole. Here are the ropes they bound us with. We'll use the cords on them."

"We'll be turnin' the tables in great shape," chuckled the detective. "How'll we work it?"

"When the first man drops out, I'll tie him. You take the next man, and after that I'll be ready for the third."

"Keno!" returned the detective, as Diamond Dick, Jr., placed himself beside the mouth of the hole and waited.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTURING THE OUTLAWS—BATTLE IN THE RUINS—CONCLUSION.

Bertie had not long to wait for the first man to appear through the hole.

It proved to be Williams, and he came out feet first.

Bertie had a noose ready, and he slipped it around the fellow's ankles and drew it tight and tied it in an instant.

Then he pulled Williams out and grabbed him about the throat before he had a chance to give a shout of warning to his two companions.

Throwing the astonished gambler flat on his face, Bertie hissed in his ear:

"Say one word above a whisper, and I'll kill you! Put your hands behind you."

There was no doubt that Bertie meant business, and Williams obeyed him without demur.

As Bertie tied his hands Gordon grabbed the next one to make his appearance, who proved to be Birdsall.

Our hero then sprang to the hole and waited for Black Bruce.

Baxter was not slow in coming.

He backed out, as the other two had done, and Bertie did not lay hands upon him until he was entirely out of the hole; he then struck the fellow a heavy blow with his fist on the back of the head in such a manner as to stun him.

While he was bewildered and almost helpless, Bertie secured him with little trouble.

"How did you two fellows get free?" snapped Black Bruce.

"You'll have to guess," returned Bertie.

"What are you going to do with us?"

"Turn you over to the Government."

A shade of anxiety passed over the faces of all three of the men.

"What are you going to turn us over to the Government for?" asked Williams.

"The Government has a little account to settle with you on account of that Indian money stolen at Tucson."

A surprised oath fell from Baxter's lips.

"How do you happen to know anything about that money?"

"That makes little difference to you. I know, and that's all there is to it. You tried to throw the responsibility on Comet Kate, but you did not succeed. I have got you now, Bruce—"

"And it strikes me that I've got you and the whole gang! Hands up, Diamond Dick, Jr.! Hands up! I haven't any more love for you than I have for Black Bruce—not a bit."

As these words were gruffly spoken, half a dozen men, led by Mexican Monte, filed out from behind the pyramid of skulls and faced the little group in the chamber.

Mexican Monte's men were all armed, and they had drawn a bead on Bertie and Gordon.

Bertie was face to face with a serious difficulty—he realized that at once.

One false move on his part might cost both him and Gordon their lives.

"Shoot 'em down, Monte!" cried Black Bruce. "Shoot 'em down, and I'm your friend forever."

"You'll be the first fellow I shoot!" growled Monte. "I don't want anything to do with you or your gambler pals, and—"

Crack!

Bertie had performed an old trick of his while Monte's attention was drawn to Black Bruce.

Suddenly raising his revolver, he had snuffed out the light and plunged the room in darkness.

Throwing himself upon Gordon, Bertie bore him to the ground just as a volley was poured over their heads.

The deafening echoes of that broadside had hardly died away when a flare of torches illuminated the gloom, and a loud yell broke the momentary stillness of the place.

"We're comin', Bertie! Yer ole pard is thunderin' erlong on the down grade, sixty miles an hour, the throttle wide open, an' the governor belt off. Look out fer trouble. The Sarpint of Siskiyou is uncoiled an' ready fer biz!"

Just then a number of men sprang into the room from behind the skull pile.

Handsome Harry, a revolver in each hand, was in the van.

Behind him came Tom Barnes, and after them trooped several persons whom Bertie did not know.

"Fight!" yelled Monte. "Death or the penitentiary awaits us all, so do your best!"

Mexican Monte had turned to face his new foes.

This brought his back to Bertie, and our hero leaped forward like a tiger and sprang upon him, bearing him backward to the earth.

Here a fierce struggle ensued, for Monte was a desperate man and had the strength of an ox.

Gordon, however, hurried to our hero's assistance, and between them both the man was secured.

Meantime the bullets had been flying thick about the chamber.

It was a fierce fight, and Handsome Harry was in his element.

The redoubtable old warrior seemed to be here, there, and everywhere, using his fists only, for he had suddenly discovered that it was better to take live prisoners than dead ones.

The fight was brief, for the Mexicans were outnumbered.

They were dismayed, also, at the loss of their leader so early in the battle, and finally, with two of their number wounded, the rest surrendered.

"Well, Little Thunderbolt," said Handsome Harry, "you've been goin' it alone, have ye? Yer ole pard an' t much good, hey?"

"My old pard is all right," replied Bertie, with a smile, but he isn't always around when you want him."

"Tries ter be, but he can't put himself in more'n two or three places at once."

Handsome Harry turned and looked at the prisoners.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, humorously; "my old friend Williams. "How are ye, Williams?"

"I've got a score to settle with you."

"We'll talk about that arter ye git out of the pen. Howdy, Black Bruce. How are ye feelin' these days?"

"I'm feeling as though I'd like to put a Winchester slug through your carcass."

"Blood-thirsty as usual. Arter ye serve out yer sentence

fer doin' this Gov'ment job, they'll hang you for the murder of Holcomb. Holcomb's pard has been hot on yer trail an' it's a wonder ter me he hasn't bagged ye afore this."

"Who are these two men, Diamond Dick, Jr.?" asked Barnes, coming up.

"One's name is Williams, the other's is Birdsall. This fellow here is Black Bruce. This is the trio that robbed the Government at Tucson, and I'd advise you to make your arrest now, for I know that Bruce Baxter is wanted for several other crimes."

Barnes stepped up and went through the formality of placing the prisoners under arrest.

Another man stepped up to Mexican Monte.

"Jose Monte, I arrest you for robbing the Val d'Oro mine of one million dollars, more or less, in gold."

"It's one thing to arrest me and another thing to prove the charge for which I am arrested," replied the Mexican, with a shrug of his shoulders.

At this a fiery little man, well dressed and with a big mustache, stepped forward and shook his forefinger in Monte's face.

"I trusted you, sir—you worked for me in the mine, and you robbed me. I know all about it, and now that I have captured you, I shall put you through, for it has cost me four hundred thousand dollars to get you. I will take every penny of it out of your hide."

"You will have a good time, Senor Carvalho."

"I will enjoy myself."

"How do you know I stole your money?"

"Did I not see bars with my mine stamp on them in that vault of yours? Oh, you schemer, you scoundrel! I have a notion to pull your nose for you."

"How do you know I put the gold there?"

"That is a good one. I find the gold in your possession, and you want to know how I know that you stole it!"

"Come here, senor."

Barnes stepped up to Carvalho and drew him over toward Diamond Dick, Jr.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., this is Senor Carvalho, the owner of the mine that Mexican Monte has been so industriously tapping."

"Glad to meet you, senor," said Bertie, extending his hand.

"And I am glad to meet you," said the owner of the mine. "There is one thing I want to ask you."

"What is that?"

"Where is the rest of my gold?"

"Step this way."

Bertie led the Mexican over to the pyramid of skulls and made an opening in the side of the pile.

"There," he said, pointing to the coins beneath, "there is your gold."

"These!" cried Carvalho; "why, diable! these are doubloons that look as though they had come out of some old galleon. They are like two or three we picked up in Monte's vault."

"Monte ran your gold into molds transforming it into these coins."

"Why did he do that?"

"In order to avoid suspicion when he should finally possess himself of this vast treasure. If you were to hear that he had discovered a treasure left in this place by the old Spaniards, you would never have connected him with the robbery of your mine, would you?"

"Clever! clever! Oh, but the rascal should be hung!"

"How much gold have you missed from your mine?"

"I have it down exactly. Tadeo!"

"Si, senor."

A man came forward with a pair of scales in his hand.

"Bring Jose and Pedro. We will weigh the gold."

The three men stripped off and began their work.

Bertie watched them for several moments in silence.

Then he advanced to the side of Mexican Monte.

"How did you discover this secret burial-place in these ruins?"

"By accident, entirely."

"You then thought it would be a good place in which to hide your gold, did you not, and you accordingly used it for that purpose?"

"Of that I shall say nothing."

The Mexican knew that silence was golden in a time like that through which he was passing.

"Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

Bertie turned around.

"What can I do for you, Senor Carvallo?"

"This very large reward is made payable to Comet Kate, of Calabasas."

"Yes."

"I understand this young woman has been spending these Spanish doubloons with a lavish hand for some days past."

"Who told you?"

Carvallo waved his hand toward Black Bruce.

"What of it?"

"Why should I not deduct what she has spent from the reward which I am to pay her?"

"How are you going to arrive at what she has spent?"

"As soon as my men weigh the gold, the difference between what was missed from the mine and what we find here ought to give us something of an idea what Comet Kate has made 'way with."

"Sir, you make use of a wrong expression. The girl 'made 'way' with nothing. She discovered this gold. It was in the form of old Spanish doubloons. Had she not a right to think that she had chanced upon some ancient treasure? If so, the find was hers, and she had a perfect right to do with it as she pleased."

"Granted. But she should pay back to me what she has spent."

"That she is perfectly willing to do."

"I can ask nothing more."

The weighing of the gold proceeded rapidly.

At last the result was announced.

There was a difference of something like three hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars between what was found and what was missed from the mine.

"I owe Comet Kate but five thousand dollars," said Carvallo, joyfully.

"You owe her nothing," said Bertie. "Here is her receipt for the four hundred thousand dollars."

He handed the scrap of paper to Senor Carvallo as he spoke.

"She waives all right to the five thousand dollars?"

"Yes. Before you are given complete proprietorship of this gold it is only right that you prove yourself to be whom you state, Senor Carvallo, owner of the Val d'Oro mine, and testify to the stamp-mark which proves the gold to be yours."

"All that can be readily attended to in Casa Grande. I have acquaintances there who are reliable and who will vouch for me."

"Very good. Nothing remains, then, but for me to leave this gold in your possession for the present, you to make such arrangements concerning it as you see fit."

"I will leave some of my men here and accompany you to Casa Grande."

"Very well."

Bertie and Handsome Harry assisted Barnes to remove his three prisoners and escort them to the town.

The other prisoners were left behind, to be removed later, one of the detectives accompanying Bertie and Carvallo to town in order that proper requisition papers might be secured for removing Monte to Mexico for trial.

On the way to Casa Grande one of the prisoners, Bird-sall, made a full confession of the crime for which he and his two companions had been arrested.

He implicated Black Bruce and Williams inextricably.

"That was the last thing needed to make a clear case against those fellows," said Barnes. "Now I am happy. I have done a good job, and if I can work Birdsall right, I shall recover the most of the Government money."

"I wish you every success," said Bertie.

"If it hadn't been for you," said the detective, "I would have been working on a wrong tack, and the result would have been that these fellows would have gotten away while I was exhausting my professional ability upon Comet Kate."

"All's well that ends well," said Handsome Harry.

"True enough, but I want you men to understand that I'm grateful, all the same."

"We understand that, so say no more about it."

When they arrived in town Senor Carvallo introduced Bertie to several gentlemen of undoubted reliability who vouched for the Mexican in every way.

This satisfied Diamond Dick, Jr., and he gave a deep sigh of relief when he found himself clear of the Casa Grande mystery.

"It was one of the hardest jobs I ever tackled, Harry," he said to his old partner, as they walked to the hotel, "to save Comet Kate from the consequences of her foolishness. But I did it, and she has come out of the scrape without moulting a feather."

"Where is she now, boy?"

"She has left this section of the country for good."

Handsome Harry gave Bertie a peculiar look.

"Sure of it?"

"She gave me her word, and I would sooner have Comet Kate's word than some men's bonds."

In truth, that was the last our hero ever saw of that strange, beautiful girl known as "Comet Kate, of Calabasas," and later as the "Countess of Monte Cristo."

She faded from the South-western country as mysteriously as she had entered it.

Her exploits, for a time, were the theme of every town and hamlet in that part of Arizona, and even yet she is vaguely referred to as the "egg dancer from Santa Fe."

For a time our hero's work was ended; but he could no more give up his life of adventure than he could sacrifice the very air he breathed or the food he ate, and the reader may read of him again in my next story, replete with more of his novel and thrilling exploits, and entitled, "Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Call-Down; Or, The King of the Silver Box."

(THE END.)

"PAWNEE BILL AND JESSE JAMES; or, THE KANSAS RANGERS," by E. W. Wheeler, will be published in the next number (174) of the DIAMOND DICK LIBRARY.